At Christmas we honor the birth of Jesus Christ, but sometimes our Savior is forgotten in the commercialization of the season and the rush to get ready for holiday festivities. Each year the Knights of Columbus takes a leading role in reminding society that Christmas is first and foremost a holy day. The Order’s “Keep Christ in Christmas” campaign promotes the birth of Christ as the focus of the Christmas season. During the first week of December, K of C units throughout the Order turn on a switch illuminating a nativity scene to “Light Up For Christ.” Through this grassroots program, the joy of Christmas will shine from councils, parishes, private residences and public parks around the world.

On Wednesday, December 7, 2011, we held our traditional “Light Up For Christ” ceremony in conjunction with the Knights of Columbus to increase awareness of the true meaning of Christmas. A small ceremony was held to unveil and illuminate the beautiful Nativity scene set up by Brother Robert in the front window of the Parish Center. Fr. Chris Ortega presided over the event as about 40 faithful parishioners braved chilly weather to witness their faith. Afterwards, we adjourned to the Parish Center where the crowd, which had swelled to about 80, enjoyed a delicious covered dish supper.
The Season of Advent is one of the two penitential seasons in the church year. The other season is Lent. Both seasons are times of penance in the weeks prior to the celebration of the two greatest mysteries of our faith, the Incarnation & the Resurrection. During both of those seasons we wear purple vestments, symbolical of penance. In Advent we are called to repentance, to prepare for the birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

This birthday involves a most profound mystery, God becoming a human being, one of His creatures. The idea of this happening is mind-boggling. The human mind cannot comprehend it. God took on our human nature. His conception was miraculous. His conception has a similarity to that of John the Baptist. Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist in her old age, but Zachariah was his father. Although God intervened, the conception took place naturally. In the case of Christ however, the conception was divine. Mary, a human being, conceived by the direct intervention of God with no human father. It is for this reason that we believe as a dogma of faith in the Virgin Birth.

John the Baptist was the precursor of Christ. He prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah. Mary and Elizabeth were cousins. John the Baptist and Jesus were cousins. No wonder the people of the time were confused in mixing up the identity of both.

The scriptures of Advent focus on the mission of John the Baptist and his call to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The scriptures of Advent also focus on the Prophet Isaiah who foretold the coming of the Messiah. The people were so familiar with Isaiah and his writing that they easily thought John the Baptist was the Messiah.

Advent is a time to renew ourselves, to recommit ourselves to Christ. A time for reawakening ourselves, to prepare for the final coming, when God will come not as our Savior but as our Judge.

During Advent we are waiting to celebrate the Incarnation and are reminded to be more conscious of our waiting for the final call. Jesus made our salvation possible, but we must do our part. Advent is a time of self-evaluation of our Christian life. May our Advent preparation be so complete, that we can truly celebrate Christmas as a happy one.
The Eleventh Annual Cathedral Heritage Ball was held on Saturday, November 19, 2011 at the Hilton Savannah DeSoto Hotel to benefit the Cathedral Endowment Fund, which is used to preserve the architectural soundness, integrity and beauty of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist as a symbol of our faith for future generations.

Bishop Hartmayer expressed his gratitude to all the attendees whose presence was testimony to their support of our beautiful and historic church. “This is my first Heritage Ball and it was an honor to be ordained a bishop in our beautiful cathedral. “It is truly the gem of our Diocese. Your support of the Heritage Ball insures that our Cathedral will remain the celestial house of worship we currently enjoy.”

Chairperson Gretchen Reese was very appreciative of the outpouring of financial support to maintain this extraordinary Ecclesiastical Landmark. “Let me extend heartfelt appreciation to the loyal donors and sponsors who have supported this event for the past decade.” And to the attendees she said, “Thank you for supporting the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist by attending tonight. Your presence will guarantee future generations the opportunity to visit Savannah’s most magnificent church.”

Honorary Chair, Frank Rossiter also thanked all those who supported this event so that this historic treasure, symbol of our Faith and Catholic Heritage, will be preserved forever.

Over 350 attendees started arriving at 6:30 PM to begin bidding on the many silent auction items which included art, jewelry, wine, health & beauty packages, restaurant gift certificates and hotel stays to name a few. The highlight of the evening was the live auction. Spurred on by auctioneer, Artie Pinckney and Master of Ceremonies, Savannah Dan, spirited bidding on such items as a dinner at Bishop Hartmayer’s house for 10 people, an original oil painting by artist Debbie Brady Robinson, several bottles of high end wine and trips to Washington State and Tuscany, over $30,000 was raised by the silent and live auctions. “Although the figures have not yet been finalized, this year’s ball was a big success and we expect to net close to $90,000,” according to Gretchen Reese.

Mark your calendars now for next year’s Ball which will be held on November 24, 2012.

Pictured 1- Gretchen Reese; 2- Bishop Hartmayer; 3- Jack Stevens, Msgr. O’Neill; 4- Fr. Dan Firmin, Fr. Gerry Schreck; 5- Fr. Frank Ziemkiewicz, Paul and Francine Hinchey; 6- Frank and Peggy Baker; 7- Christi and Ellis Cook; 8- Fr. Chris Ortega, Suzanne Worrell; 9- Janee and Mike Przybyl; 10- Frank and Glenda Rossiter, Peter Hogan; 11- Ted and Catherine Kostelnik; 12- Doug and Stephanie Giorgio; 13- Jo Ann Green, Patti Schreck, Fr. Gerry Schreck and Nancy Schreck.
Over the years, as a Cathedral tour guide, I have often wondered who made the window in Our Lady’s Chapel, which survived the fire of 1898. There is no mark on that window. I have also wondered if the scenes in our current Cathedral windows, especially those located in the apse and transepts, contained the same scenes before the fire.

An extensive correspondence made available by Diocesan Archivist Gillian Brown between Rector Benjamin J. Keiley and Resident Manager of the Tyrolese Art Glass Company located in New York City, reveals the fluid nature of the situation to replace the windows that were destroyed in the fire of 1898.

The starting point was always the scenes that had occupied the space before the fire. However, the correspondence between Rose and Keiley shows a gradual progression towards different subject matter. Although the letters are replete with details about the composition of the windows and the position of the figures, as this iterative process unfolds, we see it drifting towards different window content.

The three large stained glass windows behind the high altar in the apse, representing scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist, were all a generous donation of Captain John Flannery when the Cathedral was rebuilt after the fire of 1898. Some time ago, Brother Robert mentioned that he had heard that they formerly contained other images, perhaps depicting Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. John the Baptist and St. Patrick.

Monsignor O’Neill showed me a booklet entitled Our Heritage, Our Future — The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, 1799–1963. It was published on the occasion of the rededication of the restored Cathedral on March 24, 1963, with the Most Reverend Thomas J. McDonough, Bishop of Savannah, presiding. The booklet stated that before the Cathedral burned on the evening of February 6, 1898, the three current apse windows, containing scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist, were in fact three other windows in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. John the Baptist, and St. Patrick.

This was further confirmed by Theodore Rose of the Tyrolese Art Glass Company, in a letter dated October 3, 1898. He said that these windows — Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Patrick and St. John — were originally each $600, but he thought they could be duplicated for about $550. However, in a subsequent letter dated November 25, 1899, he quotes a firm price for the three sanctuary windows of $650 each.

Finally, in a report to the parishioners on the status of the restoration, prepared by Fr. Benjamin J. Keiley, dated April 10, 1900, he said, “The 3 windows over the high altar, these windows formerly had figures of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. John the Baptist and St. Patrick, it is proposed to have these windows represent scenes in the life of St. John the Baptist. The cost of each is $650.

Additional information on two of the most beautiful windows in the Cathedral, the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the north transept and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the south transept, also began to emerge.
The Our Heritage, Our Future booklet further stipulates that “Formerly these two large transept windows had images of the Adoration of the Wise Men and the Crucifixion; these, however, were destroyed in the fire of 1898.” And according to Rector Keiley, “these windows originally cost $1,850 each but they can be replaced exactly as before for $1,200 each. This estimate on the windows, which is very much the lowest bid, is based on the expressed condition that the firm (Tyrolese Art Glass Company) shall furnish all the windows. They had the contract in the former Cathedral.” Although it is not necessarily conclusive, this statement suggests that the Innsbruck Glassmakers may have supplied the original windows, including the one in the Blessed Virgin Chapel which survived the fire.

In order to gain some clarity around this situation, this past spring we contacted the Tyrolese Art Glass Company of Innsbruck, Austria, and posed several questions about our windows as follows:

“Did Tiroler Glasmalerei (Tyrolese Art Glass Company) supply the original windows, which were installed between 1873—1876, including St. Cecilia and St. Agnes window that survived the fire of 1898?

“Do you have any information about the changes in the content of the three apse windows which before the fire had figures of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. John the Baptist and St. Patrick, and two transept windows, which previously depicted The Adoration of the Wise Men and The Crucifixion, which were changed to The Ascension of Jesus and The Assumption of Mary?”

After a couple of months, we received the following reply from Austria:

“My name is Gernot Fussenegger of the Tyrolese Art Glass Company in Innsbruck. Our company is planning an exhibition this year on occasion of our 150 year anniversary. All of the old windows for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Savannah were executed by the Tyrolese Art Glass Company in Innsbruck. It was our first important order in the United States, the first order of 1875 embraced 20 figural and not-figural windows, followed by 12 figural windows in 1880 and 1881 and further 6 figural windows in 1885. The gap between 1875 and 1880 was the result of a tariff increase which was subsequently suspended.

“Regarding the apse and transept windows, I have no information regarding why the content was changed however we do have copies of the original cartoons of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help apse window and the Adoration of the Wise Men transept window which I will send.”

Although there is extensive correspondence in the diocesan archives regarding the apse and transept windows, sadly the decision to alter their content is obscured from our eyes by the haze of time. But through the good offices of the Tyrolese Art Glass Company, we do have a glimpse of what some of those windows looked like before the fire.

To be continued: More stained glass window mysteries solved in the next issue.
Good News! Starting December 16th, people all over the country will be seeing Catholics Come Home® TV Commercials, inviting Catholics who have strayed from the practice of their faith to return “home” to the Catholic Church.

The commercials, sponsored by CatholicsComeHome.org, are the same ones that the Diocese of Savannah sponsored last year, and they will run from mid-Advent through the Feast of the Epiphany, January 8, 2012. The commercials will appear more than 400 times on a variety of national broadcast and cable networks in both English and Spanish, including: CBS, NBC, ABC, TNT, TBS, USA, Univision, and more. This first-ever national television event will bring a message of hope and invitation to more than 250 million viewers across the United States during the Christmas Season. At the same time, this initiative will effectively support our own apostolic mission of spreading the good news of Jesus and His Church to the ends of the earth.

As you may already be aware, 70% of baptized Catholics worldwide are not practicing their faith and Mass attendance has plummeted since the 1960s. But, as all the dioceses that have partnered with Catholics Come Home to date can attest, the Holy Spirit is working through modern media, guiding Catholics who are away from their faith to return “home.” We pray for this national campaign to create the largest family reunion in our Catholic Church history!

To date, in the diocese where these Catholics Come Home TV commercials have aired as part of a multi-media campaign, Mass attendance has increased 10% on average. In addition, there’s also evidence of a deepening Catholic identity, which has often resulted in parishioners returning to Reconciliation, increased involvement in parish life, and an increase in parish and diocese financial support.

To preview the ads and for ideas on how to welcome returning Catholics to our parish, go to www.catholicscomehome.org/ParishWelcome. This landing page will answer your questions about the Catholics Come Home national campaign and provide you with parish welcoming resources. Additional information will be coming soon on the Diocese of Savannah’s Catholics Come Home microsite: http://cch.diosav.org/.

In the meantime, please pray for our brothers and sisters who are looking for a way back to church and just need a little inspiration, reminder or emotional connection that these TV commercials can provide. We pray that they hear the call and answer it by coming to Mass once again. When they do, please welcome them and encourage them to keep coming back throughout the Christmas season and thereafter. Let us pray for this national campaign to create the largest family reunion in our Church’s history! May we each have a hand in helping these lost souls come back to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church we call home. Amen.
As reported by the Vatican News Service, on Monday evening, November 7, 2011, the Holy Father presided at Vespers for the opening of the academic year in pontifical universities, in the Vatican Basilica and focused his homily on priestly ministry.

“Ever since the beginning of the Church, it was clear that the guides of those early communities were given particular importance, instituted by the Apostles to announce the Word of God through preaching and celebrating Christ’s sacrifice. Tending Christ’s flock is the vocation and task they share; it binds them to one another because they are united by a special bond to Christ.”

The Pope then went on to identify three preconditions for a priest’s life to ensure its conformity to Christ: “the aspiration to collaborate with Jesus in spreading the Kingdom of God, the gratuitousness of pastoral commitment, and an attitude of service.”

“God the Father sent the eternal Son into the world to accomplish His plan of salvation. Christ Jesus founded the Church so that the beneficial effects of redemption would be extended over time. The vocation of priests has its roots in this action of the Father, which was accomplished by Christ through the Holy Spirit. The minister of the Gospel is a person who allows himself to be seized by Christ, who knows how ‘to abide’ in Him, who enters into harmony and intimate friendship with Him, so that everything occurs ‘as God would have it’, according to His will of love, with great inner freedom and profound joy of heart.”

Turning then to reflect on the gratuitousness of pastoral commitment, Benedict XVI noted that “we must never forget that we enter the priesthood through the Sacrament of Ordination. This means opening ourselves to the action of God by daily choosing to give ourselves for Him and for our fellow man. … The Lord’s call to the ministry is not the fruit of any particular merit, it is a gift we must accept and to which we must respond by generously and disinterestedly dedicating ourselves, not to our own project but to that of God, that He may dispose of us according to His will, even though this may not correspond to our own desire for self-fulfillment. … As priests, we must never forget that the only legitimate ascension towards the ministry of pastor is not that of success but that of the Cross.”

“From this point of view, to be a priest means to serve, also by leading an exemplary life,” the Pope added. “Priests dispense the means of salvation, the Sacraments, especially those of the Eucharist and Penance. They cannot dispose of them as they please, but humbly dispense them for the good of the People of God. Their lives are profoundly marked by this service — from tending the flock to faithfully celebrating the liturgy — and by readiness to serve all their brothers and sisters, especially the poorest and those most in need. By implementing this ‘pastoral charity,’ on the model of Christ and with Christ, wherever the Lord may call, each priest fulfills both himself and his vocation.”
Every year the Cathedral is decorated in an elegant seasonal manner, which substantially enhances our Christmas experience. Almost 20,000 people visit the Cathedral each year during the Christmas season to see these beautiful decorations. The 42 inch wreaths and red bows hanging from each column, immediately command your attention when you first enter the church. Along with the unique Poinsettia Tree, the elegant manger scene, one of the most beautiful aspects of the decorations, completes this beautiful, faith filled Christmas masterpiece.

Most of us enjoy the visual nature of the decorations but few fully appreciate all the effort that goes into setting up the display annually and then disassembling it and storing the elements until next year. It all starts with the large pieces of wooden staging plus the metal frame for the poinsettia tree that must be moved up from the cathedral basement piece by piece. The tree, a display of 250 poinsettia plants, standing over 22 feet high, needs to be assembled. Although we see a beautiful conical shaped tree filled with poinsettias, it is in fact a metal frame which must be erected along with the intricate watering system, ready to accept the many plants which are hung on it to produce the shape of this beautiful tree.

The centerpiece of the decorations is the Crèche representation of the Infant Jesus in the manger, surrounded by figures of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, animals, and the Wise Men, with a Jerusalem backdrop. After the staging is erected, the decorative elements including the sky, star, Jerusalem skyline, mountains, trees, manger and figures, must also be moved up and added to the display. Expanded several years ago, often extending to the full depth of Our Lady’s Chapel, it contains trees, mountains and running water and sometimes allows for visitors to stroll through the display.

Brother Robert has been putting up the decorations since he came here in 1986 but over the last several years he has been ably assisted by Orlando Cuadra who comes up to Savannah from Lake Worth, Florida, where he lives, to spend a about a week and lend a hand. Originally from Managua, Nicaragua, Orlando lived in...
The Cathedral Council of Catholic Women's Giving Tree helps the poor. This is the Season we should remember the less fortunate in the same way we do our loved ones. There is a whole new level of people seeking help that are called the working poor and one out of four children go to bed hungry in America every night, even on Christmas, and even in Savannah. We hope everyone helps as best they can by taking an angel from the tree and returning with what the angel requested. The CCW Giving Trees are in the back of the Cathedral and we hope to fill the boxes under the tree many times over this year. Donations from the Cathedral’s angels will be moved each week to The Social Apostolate at 500 E. Liberty Street. A smaller giving tree is in place for the rescue and care of displaced animals. Donations for this tree will be taken to the Humane Society.

Proceeds from their Annual Bake Sale of Home Made Fudge, Pecan Pies and Pound Cakes, also went to benefit the sick and poor.

It is through giving that we receive

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Gartland Service Award Presented to Cathedral Parishioners

Every year since 2000, the Diocese of Savannah has recognized long-standing service to the Catholic Church in South Georgia by conferring the Bishop Francis X. Gartland Service Award on honorees nominated by their pastors. Carol Letcher and Emmet Casey were among this year's 84 recipients of the Gartland Service Awards presented this year by Bishop Hartmayer on November 20, 2011, the Solemnity of Christ the King, in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. The Gartland Award was established to recognize distinguished service over a period of years to the Church community and the Diocese of Savannah, in the tradition of our first Bishop, Francis X. Gartland, who died of yellow fever contracted from those he ministered to in 1854. Congratulations to Carol and Emmet on this well-deserved award. We thank them for their many years of volunteer service to the Cathedral.